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Live Projects as Critical Pedagogies

Ruth Morrow and James Benedict Brown

The chapters in this publication offer the student, teacher or community member a variety of perspectives on a diverse range of live project practices. In this chapter we look at where live projects sit in relation to pedagogical theory. Through a discussion of recent critiques of architectural education and our own research and practice-based case studies - a live project for an arts collective and a live project for students of architecture - we will examine how the contingent nature of live projects presents challenges to the building of coherent pedagogies. At the same time, the chapter will argue that live projects also offer potential sites for critical pedagogies and creative agency, that in turn support individual and social transformations.

Thomas Dutton observes that we all teach according to some theory (1991, p. xvi). This is perhaps an optimistic view. We would argue that architectural educators rarely locate their teaching within a pedagogical framework. There are a number of reasons for this. Within the academy, architecture is a relatively young discipline. Up until the second half of the twentieth century, architects were 'trained' in practice. As part of a wider project of professionalisation, architectural education was relocated into the abstracted and theoretical environments of universities. This position, 'removed' from practice, continues to generate insecurities and questions about architectural education's relevance and connection to professional practice. And it is this ongoing tension that leads architectural education to focus on professional goals at the cost of pedagogical means. This is certainly manifest within the documentation of ARB/RIBA¹ procedures and criteria for validation of architecture courses in the UK, which is primarily focused on the *output* rather than the *input* or form of delivery, but it is also observed in the relatively low number of architectural journals that address pedagogical concerns.

In addition, architectural educators have traditionally been drawn from practice rather than the faculty. Webster (2004, p. 4) has gone so far as to suggest that approximately sixty per cent of architectural educators are part or full time practitioners. This contributes to a culture that tends to assume that a good practitioner is a good teacher. The absence of a widespread culture of critical engagement with pedagogical theories means that many architectural educators teach just as they were taught; replicating and perpetuating even the most questionable teaching practices.

Traditionally, the model of teaching in architectural education has been grounded in a master/pupil relationship - a relationship underpinned by the profession's reverence for individual mastery. The most acute critique of this aspect of architectural culture - itself long a male dominated profession and discipline - comes naturally from feminist perspectives. Ahrentzen and Anthony (1993) have linked the manner in which the actions of certain "great men" (p. 11) are privileged to the reciprocal action that restricts the opportunity for women and other minorities to succeed; "mastery becomes legitimately defined by what the 'masters' do... One method of designating design excellence is reference to 'historical precedent.' However, history in most disciplines is a gendered construction of what happened in the past." (p. 14) Such arguments call therefore for

¹ The Architects Registration Board and the Royal Institute of British Architects respectively, who jointly establish the criteria by which schools of architecture in the UK are 'prescribed' and 'validated'.

pedagogical responses that open up debate, allowing for individual positions to be held (personal constructs) and accepted cultures to be challenged.

Other recent critiques of architectural education have focused on the effects and implications of its socialisation processes (Stevens, 1998). Architecture has become the *site par excellence* for the development and indoctrination of a hidden curriculum (Dutton, 1991), one that socialises its students in an image acceptable to the mainstream of the architectural profession, while simultaneously discrediting any value system that does not concur with that accepted image. The hot house atmosphere of the design studio intimidates its entrants into modes of behaviour that are acceptable to the majority. Ahrentzen and Anthony (op. cit.) and Groat and Ahrentzen (1997) have provided two of the most sustained and comprehensive explanations of both the symptoms and possible remedies to the gendered bias of unreformed architectural education: countering “unconstructive and hurtful examples of studio juries and other forms of student evaluation” (pp. 279-280) with a “more student-centered mode of teaching” (p. 280) that facilitates and celebrates collaboration. Explorations of the weaknesses of architectural education (Dutton, 1991; Boyer & Mitgang, 1996; Nicol & Pilling, 2000; and compellingly - because of its origin in the student community – the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), 2008) have focused on ways in which to resolve the manner in which normative architectural education serves to exclude or play down the multitude of voices and perspectives that do not form part of a traditionally, white, male, western culture of practice.

Where philosophers of education have been influential in architectural education, their theories have often been accepted without sustained critique or investigation. Donald Schön was the first philosopher of education to theorise architectural education (Webster, 2008) and his (primarily cognitive) interpretation of the ‘reflective practitioner’ in the design studio described in *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983) remains, despite criticisms, an influential model (Schön, 1985) for teachers of architecture. While we embrace and celebrate the role of reflection in the education of the designer, we remain concerned about the ease with which Schön associates reflection with solitary artistry that can only be learned by reproduction by the apprentice of the master’s technique. We do not subscribe to the notion that reflection is always a solitary act.

That the design studio celebrated by Schön is not the only place of legitimate learning in the life of an architecture student - as it was in the autonomous ateliers of the Parisian École des Beaux Arts - is no longer contested. Webster (2008), amongst others, notes that there are affective and corporeal dimensions to learning happening both in the studio and outside it. Not only do students learn elsewhere in the school and outside it, but they also bring valuable knowledge and experience from their lives into it. This relates to our interest in how live projects draw out experiences, knowledge and skills that are not exposed, utilised or valorised in normative design studio models. Individually students represent expert users of the built environment and collectively they are potentially more able to access information faster and from more diverse areas than a lone authoritative pedagogue. The normative model of architectural education, which elevates the master and the autonomous design studio above all other forms and sources of knowledge, including those held by the students themselves, does not support the development of a progressive and inclusive model of architectural education. Through our experiences as students, architects and teachers we align ourselves to the idea that learning must be situated, and situated reflexively, in order that a dialogue of equality can be established between

teachers and students. Sachs (2003) talks of the power of the teacher becoming the learner; the need for teachers to be seen “to practice the value of learning.” Placing the learner/teacher relationship in flux echoes C. Greig Crysler’s thoughts that “critical pedagogy attempts to show the logic of specific power relations and struggles in the educational process. Students and teachers question how knowledge is constituted, by whom, for whom, and for what purpose” (1995, p. 208). Live projects are, if pedagogically understood and appropriately managed, a natural setting for a situated, critical and inclusive education.

Live projects and critical pedagogies

So in the context of such critiques we look to critical pedagogy as a way to address some of these concerns and to live projects as a vehicle for critical pedagogies. We might be expected, at this point, to propose a definition, but in McClaren’s words, “it should be stressed that there is no one critical pedagogy.” (1998, p. 227, cited by Wink, 2000, p. 28) Our own understanding of the term is informed firstly by the Brazilian radical educator and theorist Paulo Freire, and secondly by one of his more eloquent North American disciples, Henry Giroux. Of particular importance to both Freire (1996) and Giroux (1991, 2010) is that critical pedagogy is defined by the context in which the student learns, what Freire calls the “here and now” (1996, p.66). As a result of that *contextuality*, critical pedagogy can only be understood as a project of individual and social transformation, one that resists single pedagogical theorisation. We believe that both live projects and critical pedagogies are inherently *contextual*, marked by the precise conditions and time in which they are conceived and in which they operate.

Pedagogies aligned not only to “real” contexts, but also “real” communities and stakeholders in those contexts, inevitably lead to increased contact with a range of people beyond the academy. The impact of situating pedagogical projects in community contexts offers not only enhanced pedagogical experiences, but also allows the work of students to be valued by people outside higher education. This supports the aspiration of feminist critics such as Ahrentzen and Anthony to develop and value non-academic forms of knowledge: “ways of knowing that involve personal experience, consciousness-raising, subjectivity, or relational connections.” (op. cit, p. 11) It also recalls Denise Scott Brown’s aspiration, first drafted in 1975: “that schools can and should reduce the value of the importance of the star system by broadening the student’s view of the profession to show value in its other aspects. Heaven knows, skills other than design are important to the survival of architecture firms.” (2009, p. 86) Of great interest to us is the potential for live projects to offer sites of creative, social and cultural exchange and transformative experiences and outcomes that allow students and staff to directly challenge or subvert the sometimes overpowering hidden curriculum of the apprenticeship-derived model of architectural education.

It is the dynamic and highly contingent nature of live projects that opens them up to multiple readings and voices, and why we contend that they are viable models of critical pedagogies in architectural education. Live projects naturally create spaces in which teacher, student and client sit alongside each other, in spaces in which the teacher can neither control nor predict the outcome.

From Space Shuttle to Street Society: engaged practice and engaged pedagogy

Schools of architecture are generally hierarchical institutions. The length of the education and the tendency of educators to utilise passive ‘transmission’ or ‘banking’ models of education (Freire, 1996) together contribute to a socially constrained learning environment that has been widely critiqued by architectural educators (Boyer & Mitgang, 1996; Crysler, 1995; Nicol & Pilling, 2000; Stevens, 1998; Webster 2004, 2008; Wink, 2000) and students (AIAS, 2008; Willenbrock, 1991) alike. Live projects, however, can begin to introduce a element of *hierarchy in flux* into the school, opening up the internal, controlled discourse to uncontrolled external voices and influences. Architectural educators might argue that the conventional design studio, unlike lecture-based forms of teaching, already allows such discourse to occur, being as it is a collective space of debate, analysis and synthesis. While not denying the importance of the studio environment, we believe that in grounding live projects in both the physical and human environment of the wider community, students can be introduced to an intellectual space that is unpredictable, that has to be negotiated and in which expansive conversations can happen. Such conversations subvert the passive ‘banking’ of facts and values that are ‘transmitted’ by the teacher. Engaging in live projects beyond the academy also echos Till’s concern that we recognise contingency as an opportunity rather than as a threat to architectural practice. He cautions us that “there is no one way to behave professionally” (2009, p. 183), going on to cite Barbara Herrnstein Smith, who reinforces that “where difference continuously emerges it must be either continuously negotiated or continuously suppressed, the latter always at somebody’s cost and often enough, it appears in the long run, at considerable communal cost” (Till, p. 184). This negotiated, collaborative mode of learning leads naturally to an experience that can become transformative, and in a manner which demands that students exercise their own judgement. When live projects introduce students to the lived worlds of clients and users, it quickly becomes apparent that there is no single unassailable fact.

The transformative nature of live projects requires deeper examination, not only in the context of architectural education but also within community engaged practice and particularly in contexts that are in a critical condition (i.e. socially, politically, culturally, economically, etc). We would also contend that learning or ‘taking reality into your own hands’ can occur as much within a moment as over a twelve week modularised semester: one week live projects may therefore be just as productive in educational terms as those that last for a year or more. We propose that live projects act as sites of critical pedagogy for two reasons. Firstly, that they not only nurture the individual and collective critical consciousnesses of the teachers, clients and staff involved, but that they also, by their very existence, critique the normative models of architectural education and hence practice in which they are located. To best understand the potential of live projects as vehicles of critical pedagogy, we will examine two live project case studies that shift between the academy and practice, influencing and being influenced by their engagement with sites, contexts and people outside the academy. The critical context of our case studies is the post-conflict landscape of Belfast, Northern Ireland. These examples are pedagogical ‘events’. The first, Space Shuttle, occurred outside the academy and the second, Street Society, occurred within.

Space Shuttle: street-level pedagogies of interaction and creativity

PS² is a small Belfast-based collective of creative practitioners drawn from a range of backgrounds. It provides studio space for artists and runs a small project/gallery space in the centre of the city - all on a voluntary basis. PS² also curates creative practice outside the realm of the traditional physical places and practices of art. Morrow, one of the authors

of this chapter, participates in PS² and her experience in architectural education has, to some extent, influenced the development of this strand of PS² activities.

An example of this pedagogical connection is seen in the evolution of two PS² projects. The first - Street Archaeology - made reference to a design studio project, Room Archaeology, that Morrow had run in several UK schools of architecture. Room Archaeology asked first year architecture students to represent rooms that they found in the city through models and drawings. As a pedagogical project it was initially focused on representational skill development; increasing student's understanding of what defines rooms in the city; and demonstrating the link between representation, analysis and evaluation; but gradually it also became understood as a process of valorising everyday spaces in the city. For PS² this valorisation became a focus of the Street Archaeology project, in which invited artists, external to the PS² collective, responded through installation-based work to and in a historic but neglected Belfast street. The installations were manifestations of the artists' analyses, capturing other views and ways to value to the street. Neither Street Archaeology nor Room Archaeology, however, directly engaged the public.

[figure 1 here : Space Shuttle in situ, Donegall Pass]

Morrow's longstanding relationship to client-based live projects was part of the reasoning for PS² not just to locate projects in non-art spaces, but also seek to engage with non traditional art publics through creative practice. This shift is seen in the second PS² project, Space Shuttle, co-curated by Peter Mutschler (artist) and Morrow (architect), which projected a replica of the PS² project space (based in a culturally active area of Belfast), out into culturally under-resourced, post-conflict communities and spaces (figure 1). Space Shuttle was structured around six missions over a nine month period. Each 'mission' was 'manned' by artists or multidisciplinary groups who for the duration of ten days worked in the local environment. The Space Shuttle acted as a mobile 'test lab' (12m²) for urban creativity and social interaction. We find it striking that this same description (a test lab for urban creativity and social interaction) could be applied to the activities of a live project in architectural education. The artists and groups involved brought a distinct approach to each of the missions, demonstrating a spectrum of work practices and strategies in urban creativity. They were exposed to real and sometimes alien encounters with people on the streets of Belfast and demonstrated various degrees of public participation and site-specific originality.

Morrow, as co-curator of Space Shuttle, was also personally involved in the first mission of Space Shuttle: Pass Odyssey, which occurred in Donegall Pass. Donegall Pass is a small, predominantly Protestant, working-class community on the edge of Belfast city centre. At the time of the Space Shuttle Project (2006/2007) it was a community that was slowly evolving from the traumatic effects of the Troubles.

The Troubles is the name given to the period of conflict in Northern Ireland (1966-1996). During that time sectarian riots and intimidation caused mass shifts in urban populations. Areas of working class housing (particularly in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry) were burned or demolished and streets cleared to create distinct territorial divisions between the opposing communities. The majority of lives were and still are lived in segregated, single identity communities (Morrow, Mackell & Fitzgerald, 2011). In 1998, the Good Friday Peace Agreement was signed, giving rise to a sustained, though at times tense, peace

process. Society in Northern Ireland has, since then, been airing its grievances, acknowledging painful memories and learning not so much how to solve but how to manage conflict. Within this context, the aim of Pass Odyssey was to make creative practice visible, in the modest hope that it might offer the Donegall Pass community potential mechanisms to better understand and take control of their own future. Following consultation, an eight day event evolved focused on the theme of the environment. The Space Shuttle acted as a multifunctional base for a series of events and provocative multimedia activities. Local residents and passers-by were invited to explore the environment of Donegall Pass in novel ways (fig. 2), encouraging new strategies to sustain and foster pride and confidence in the community.

Fig 2 : Pass Odyssey Events

The Big Whinge Box	An elaborate contraption to collect environmental concerns and pass them on to local representatives and concerned bodies.
A Doorbell For The Pass	Design a doorbell ring to capture the sounds of the pass.
Passbroadcast	Come and broadcast to the Pass. Visits to BBC and local radio stations.
Model Pass	Workshop to explore ideas for a site on Posnett Street. Architects and landscape architects on hand to help out.
Audio Tour	We'll be collecting audio memories related to the Pass. Come in and listen our contribute your own memories.
Shiny, Sparkly Sunday Afternoon	An afternoon of luxury for the woman of the Pass, perhaps a manicure, a head massage or a pedicure. Come and indulge yourself in the Space Shuttle.
Space Walk	Children's workshop – making space suits for life as an urbanaut. Director of Armagh Planetarium will help us to survive the dangers of space. Star in a moonwalk video.
Big Projection Night	We are collecting images of life of the Pass both past and present of your special occasions (weddings, birthdays etc) and daily lives. Together with the historic images that have been on show this week in the shuttle (from Ulster Museum) we will show all during open-air Big Projection Night on the last night of the Mission.

In the end, Pass Odyssey lasted little more than a week, but it was the first art event of its kind to be located in the community and it led to ongoing relationships. A women's group was formed within the subsequent months. There had been none prior to the Space Shuttle landing (hence the inclusion of the Shiny Sparkly Sunday event) and Morrow subsequently became a founding board member of the Community Development Company.

Street Society: challenging value systems through engagement and pace

Back in the academy (Queen's University Belfast), another live project – Street Society – runs annually over a one week period. It draws on the learning gained from Space Shuttle. Beyond acting as a teaching / learning vehicle for students, Street Society echoes Space Shuttle by aiming to offer support to external organisations. Client groups have included

charities, cultural initiatives and a number of community organisations situated along or around 'Interface zones'. Interface zones in Northern Ireland are those boundaries between segregated Nationalist and Loyalist residential communities where tensions occur. Interface zones can be open wasteland or physical walls, known locally as 'peace walls'. Many of the client groups involved fall into that category of critical users, i.e. people whose needs can be complex and pressing, and who have few alternatives.

By capitalising on the creative capacity of groups of between eight and twelve students from across the undergraduate (first year) and postgraduate (fifth year) architecture courses, Street Society seeks to position itself as a means for the University to enable modest, low-level, but highly charged steps to support ongoing societal transformation in the post-conflict context of Northern Ireland.

[figure 3 - Street Society project tbc]

While live projects at other schools of architecture can last up to a full calendar year, we have found that the short duration of the Street Society week has not limited the extent to which students have been accepted by representatives of the communities. In fact, whilst some of these client groups have experienced over-consultation from various public bodies, they are typically receptive and open to students entering their situation for just one week. Whereas a longer project might encourage students to acquire the clients' brief and retreat into the academy, there is not enough time for students to illegitimately possess the project, allowing communities to remain in the driving seat, engaged and empowered. For students, connecting through their clients to the task at hand can intensify their connections to their own learning and to the role of architecture: *"when I realised how much the clients cared about the project it made me care all the more"* (1st year student comment). In Street Society we have witnessed open collaboration and exchanges that have left both students and client bodies empowered by the experience. Whilst Street Society remains strongly in the realm of a pedagogical event, it nevertheless opens up potentials and lines of communication for longer term relationships between the university and communities. By merging first and fifth year for one week, our younger students learn valuable skills and techniques from their more experienced seniors, but at the same time our older students are reminded of the unsocialised but highly valuable knowledge and experience that they perhaps have disregarded or seen devalued during the lengthy course of their architectural education.

Conclusions

In the first section of this chapter we suggested that architectural educators struggle to place their work within pedagogical frameworks. But when live projects dissolve the conditions and relationships of normative architectural education, there is a urgent necessity and real opportunity to reconsider its pedagogical framework. Space Shuttle and Street Society have through their respective missions and projects, developed some key pedagogical themes about live projects. At the conclusion of Space Shuttle, Morrow conducted a post project evaluation of Pass Odyssey through the lens of pedagogy (Morrow 2007, p 79). The same lens will be used to draw conclusions from both Space Shuttle and Street Society.

Who shapes the curriculum?

Pass Odyssey was seen to offer an 'action-based' pedagogy for the community. Activities such as workshops, collecting, archiving and re-presenting community perspectives were used to engage the community in a reflection and discussion of the value and potential of its own environment. At the same time, the actions were framed in such a way as to demonstrate 'creative practice', as a means of searching for positive outcomes. But despite a period of consultation prior to the start of the project, the 'curriculum' was to all intents and purposes framed by the creative practitioners rather than the community itself. In contrast, we have worked to ensure that the curriculum content of Street Society is determined at the first level by external clients and then by the postgraduate students who shortlist and select which projects they align themselves to. The postgraduate students act as project managers, and we believe that in order for clients to be assured of delivery, students must be personally connected and motivated by 'the curriculum' in order to fully engage.

Who's in the classroom?

This was perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of Space Shuttle. It had been assumed that 'the class' would be made up of the community. Donegall Pass is, geographically, a well defined space of about nine hundred inhabitants. Its boundaries are defined by major roads and a railway line, and due to sectarian pressures it has pulled back even further from some boundaries to create highly defensive spaces. It is therefore easy to assume on a spatial reading that this is a coherent and well defined community. But those taut boundaries belie a community that has been fragmented by the trauma of the Troubles and which struggles to function coherently. Making connections to those who we had hoped would be in the 'classroom' became the focus of Pass Odyssey. Fringe activities such as the 'shiny sparkly sunday afternoon' were used to bring together potential groupings.

The same is true of all classrooms. We should remind ourselves that being in the classroom is no guarantee that all those present are necessarily ready to engage with learning via the 'teacher'. Peer learning, facilitated by social spaces and activities can offer alternative routes to learning. At the beginning of Street Society, we instinctively created an online virtual social space for students to interact through - the extent and pace at which they made it a site of enthusiastic exchange was unanticipated, and it is has now, to some extent, been superseded by virtual spaces created by the students themselves on other social network platforms.

What has been learnt?

At the end of Space Shuttle, the creative practitioners involved came together to produce a publication (Mutschler and Morrow, 2007) as a reflection on the process and a way to disseminate the lessons learned to others. At the end of Street Society, students and clients meet in a 'neutral' venue, away from the school of the architecture (in the white space of a contemporary art gallery, or the lecture theatre of a museum) to present and discuss the projects. Despite these acts, it remains extremely difficult to map what has been learned in both Space Shuttle and Street Society. This is in part because of the complexity of live projects. We would also contend that the normative means of assessment - asking what knowledge has been acquired - relates too closely to transmission models of teaching in which the only means to assess effectiveness is

through measuring the quantity of information retained by the student at the end of the learning period.

In Street Society, the depth and breadth of what is learnt across the projects (eight to twelve projects run simultaneously each year) is almost impossible to capture. What is important is that what has been learnt can be applied in other contexts. With that in mind, we ask the first year undergraduate students to reflect on and define the learning they experienced in Street Society, and present their findings as part of a Professional Skills Module ten days after the end of the event. We also use this session to illicit feedback on Street Society that we can use to better craft the event the following year.

We have, however, failed in both projects to formally capture the learning of the external organisations involved, although informal feedback leads us to believe that the parallel exchanges between creative practitioners and community, students and client organisations are rich and supportive.

Space Shuttle asked who is in the classroom, what are their roles and how could they be engaged. By setting live projects in the community, we can create conditions that allow participants of academic and non-academic backgrounds to intermingle and reframe their knowledge in mutually complimentary ways. Meanwhile, Street Society enables our students to find their own voices and their own motivations. Seeing their work according to value systems located outside academe, our students experience a heightened awareness of their ability to contribute and to be valued.

Live projects respond to the uncontrolled contexts that present themselves, and are therefore innately opportunistic. This presents a challenge for traditional pedagogical frameworks in which the teacher determines what the student will learn and judges the extent of learning based on a product for which a template already exists. The template either takes the form of an existing precedent or, (in the case of a former design tutor of one of the authors), a range of acceptable solutions diligently worked out in detail prior to the beginning of the project. Where live projects move into contingent spaces, pedagogy must shift its focus from the teachers judgement of the product / the taught / the architecture to the teacher's judgement of the student's reflection of the process / the learnt / the architectural practice. Where this shift in pedagogical focus is not understood, live projects risk repeating normative models of architectural education, operating without sufficient interrogation of their pedagogical actions and under-exploiting their pedagogical potential. In order to make the learning in live projects long lasting, framed reflection post-live project is a vital pedagogical tool. The two live projects we describe have, for us, become clearly identifiable places of dialogue, exchange and – therefore – transformation. We are reminded of Paulo Freire once again, who explains that:

“Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on ‘authority’ are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher.” (1996, p. 61)

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